Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

Message Text

PAGE 01 STATE 215921

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 215921

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: FR, PINT, PGOV

SUBJECT: FRANCE'S NEW GOVERNMENT

1. FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF INR REPORT NO. 576, DATED
AUGUST 31, 1976.
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PAGE 02 STATE 215921

2. AFTER WEEKS OF SPECULATION ABOUT SERIOUS DIFFERENCES
BETWEEN PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING AND HIS GAULLIST
PRIME MINISTER, JACQUES CHIRAC, THE PRIME MINISTER DECLARED
ON AUGUST 25 THAT HE HAD SUBMITTED HIS RESIGNATION. LATER

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

THAT DAY THE PRESIDENT ANNOUNCED THAT FOREIGN TRADE MINISTER RAYMOND BARRE, A NON-GAULLIST TECHNICIAN, WOULD BE HIS NEW PRIME MINISTER, AND ON AUGUST 27 THE COMPOSITION OF THE NEW FRENCH GOVERNMENT WAS MADE PUBLIC.

3. THE NEW TEAM: GAULLISTS OCCUPY NINE OF THE 36 POSTS IN THE CABINET COMPARED WITH 13 OUT OF 43 IN THE PREVIOUS CHIRAC TEAM. HOWEVER, THEY RETAIN THEIR PREVIOUS TOTAL OF FIVE SENIOR MINISTERIAL POSTS. THE MOST IMPORTANT CHANGES IN THE CABINET INVOLVE:

(A)--OLIVIER GUICHARD (NEW MINISTER OF STATE AND JUSTICE MINISTER), THE SENIOR GAULLIST IN A GOVERNMENT HEADED BY A PRESIDENT AND A PRIME MINISTER WHO, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE FIFTH REPUBLIC, ARE BOTH NON-GAULLISTS;

(B)--LOUIS DE GUIRINGAUD (NEW FOREIGN MINISTER), A CAREER DIPLOMAT FOR 40 YEARS AND AN EXPERT ON NORTH-SOUTH ISSUES WHO IS EXPECTED TO BE VERY MUCH UNDER GISCARD'S DIRECT INFLUENCE;

(C)--JEAN-PIERRE FOURCADE (NEW CONSTRUCTION MINISTER), WHO CEDES THE ECONOMY AND FINANCE MINISTRY TO BARRE AFTER HEADING AN UNSUCCESSFUL TWO-YEAR CAMPAIGN AGAINST HIGH INFLATION AND UNEMPLOYMENT; AND

(D)--PIERRE BROUSSE (NEW COMMERCE MINISTER), WHO DEFECTED FROM THE UNION OF THE LEFT EARLIER THIS YEAR AND IS INTENDED TO SERVE AS PROOF THAT OPPOSITION FIGURES WILL BE WELCOMED INTO GISCARD'S MAJORITY PROVIDED THEY RENOUNCE AN ALLIANCE THAT INCLUDES THE COMMUNISTS.

4. WITH PRIME MINISTER BARRE ALSO RESPONSIBLE FOR THE KEY ECONOMY AND FINANCE MINISTRY, AND GUICHARD TASKED WITH TRYING TO KEEP THE UNION OF DEMOCRATS FOR THE REPUBLIC (UDR) IN LINE AND MAPPING THE MAJORITY'S POLITICAL CONFIDENTIAL

STRATEGY, GISCARD BECOMES IN EFFECT HIS OWN PRIME MINISTER. IN THE PRESENT CABINET SETUP, NO ONE BUT THE PRESIDENT SEEMS ABLE TO ASSURE COORDINATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE DAY-TO-DAY AFFAIRS OF GOVERNMENT. IN ORDER TO FULFILL HIS DESIRE TO INCREASE THE PRESIDENTIAL POWERS OF THE REGIME, GISCARD HAS CHOSEN TO BE THE DE FACTO EXECUTOR OF GOVERNMENT POLICY AT THE CABINET LEVEL. GISCARD'S INVOLVEMENT WITH GOVERNMENT ROUTINE CONTRASTS WITH THE ALOOFNESS OF HIS FIFTH REPUBLIC PREDECESSORS, WHO RESERVED SELECT POLICY AREAS FOR THEMSELVES (FOREIGN POLICY, DEFENSE, INTERNATIONAL MONETARY AFFAIRS) BUT LEFT THE DAILY BUSINESS OF GOVERNMENT TO THE PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET.

5. WHY CHIRAC QUIT: ALTHOUGH THE TONE OF THEIR PUBLIC

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

STATEMENTS ON THE RESIGNATION WAS OFTEN BITTER, GISCARD AND CHIRAC AGREED THAT THE PRIME MINISTER WANTED GREATER CONTROL OVER GOVERNMENT POLICY AND ELECTORAL STRATEGY THAN THE PRESIDENT WAS WILLING TO CONCEDE. GISCARD ALSO STATED THAT HE OPPOSED CHIRAC'S RECOMMENDATION FOR HOLDING LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS WELL IN ADVANCE OF THE MARCH 1978 DEADLINE. CHIRAC HAS NOT MADE A FULL PUBLIC DISCLOSURE OF HIS REASONS FOR RESIGNING, BUT IN PRIVATE HE IS REPORTED TO HAVE STATED THAT:

(A)--EARLY LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS ARE VITAL TO THE GAULLISTS IN ORDER TO LIMIT GAINS BY THE UNION OF THE LEFT; GISCARD DOES NOT FEEL THE SAME URGENCY SINCE HE WOULD CARRY ON AS PRESIDENT EVEN IF THE OPPOSITION WINS A MAJORITY IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY;

(B)--GISCARD IS COMMITTED TO "RULING FROM THE CENTER," WHICH IMPLIES INCREASING THE ROLE OF THE CENTRISTS AND BUILDING BRIDGES TO THE CENTER-LEFT, BOTH OF WHICH WOULD RESULT IN A DIMINUTION OF THE GAULLISTS' ROLE;

(C)--MANY OF GISCARD'S REFORM INITIATIVES, AS WELL AS HIS TINKERING WITH DEFENSE, FOREIGN POLICY, AND NUCLEAR EXPORT DECISIONS, VIOLATED GAULLIST ORTHODOXY WITHOUT PAYING POLITICAL DIVIDENDS; AND

(D)--HE WAS BECOMING INCREASINGLY UNCOMFORTABLE AS THE CONFIDENTIAL

MAJORITY'S POLITICAL COORDINATOR FOR THE 1977 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS, IN WHICH THE LEFTIST OPPOSITION PROBABLY WOULD DO WELL.

6. GISCARD'S STRATEGY: GISCARD HAS GAINED THE OPPORTUNITY TO FASHION A STRATEGY FOR HIS NEW GOVERNMENT THAT IS MORE CONSISTENT WITH HIS PREFERRED POLICY OBJECTIVES AND POLITICAL TACTICS. HE WILL PROBABLY MOVE FORWARD RAPIDLY TO TRY TO:

(A)--TAKE FULL PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE GOVERNMENT'S ACTIONS AFTER BEING CRITICIZED FOR INDECISIVENESS AND TAKING A BACK SEAT TO CHIRAC IN THE FORMULATION OF GOVERNMENT POLICY;

(B)--PRESS HIS COURTSHIP OF THE NON-COMMUNIST LEFT, WHICH COULD RESULT IN A FORMAL INVITATION TO SOCIALIST LEADER FRANCOIS MITTERRAND FOR A GENERAL POLICY DISCUSSION AT THE ELYSEE;

(C)--REASSURE THE UDR THAT HE WILL NOT TAKE STEPS TO DISMANTLE THE GAULLIST LEGACY, ESPECIALLY IN THE DEFENSE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS FIELDS;

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

(D)--MAKE THE "CHARTER FOR THE ADVANCED LIBERAL SOCIETY," WHICH HE PLANS TO ANNOUNCE ON SEPTEMBER 20, A SWEEPING REFORM PROGRAM DESIGNED TO ATTRACT WIDE SUPPORT IN THE LARGE CENTER-LEFT VOTING BLOC; AND

(E)--IMPROVE FRANCE'S DOMESTIC ECONOMY AND EXPORT PERFORMANCE BY 1978.
--

7. DOES GISCARD STILL NEED THE GAULLISTS? ALTHOUGH THE GAULLISTS MAY HAVE LOST A MEASURE OF THEIR POLITICAL IMPORTANCE AND INITIATIVE, THEY ARE STILL WELL PLACED TO FRUSTRATE THE PRESIDENT'S BEST-LAID PLANS. MANY OF GISCARD'S ACTIONS SEEM TO BE BASED ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT THE GAULLISTS HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO SUPPORT HIM, BUT THE HISTORY AND CHARACTER OF THE GAULLIST MOVEMENT DO NOT BEAR THIS OUT:
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(A)--THE GAULLISTS HAVE A TRADITION OF REJECTING OPPORTUNISM AND FLEXIBILITY, PREFERRING TO WITHDRAW INTO OPPOSITION AND RELATIVE OBSCURITY RATHER THAN COMPROMISE ON PRINCIPLE. (THEIR MOST VENERATED PRECEDENT FOR SUCH BEHAVIOR IS DE GAULLE'S "CROSSING OF THE DESERT" DURING THE 1946-58 PERIOD.)

(B)--BECAUSE OF THE PROGRESSIVE AND ANTI-CAPITALIST ELEMENTS IN DE GAULLE'S RHETORIC, HE WAS ABLE TO WIN MORE THAN 25 PERCENT OF THE WORKING CLASS VOTE; IF GAULLISM FOUNDERS, THESE VOTERS WILL MORE LIKELY VOTE FOR THE SOCIALISTS THAN FOR GISCARD, WHOM THEY CONTINUE TO CONSIDER AN ARCH-CONSERVATIVE.

(C)--MANY GAULLISTS WOULD RELISH THE OPPORTUNITY TO HUMBLE GISCARD, WHOM THEY CRITICIZE FOR HIS TEPID AND CONDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR DE GAULLE, HIS TROUNCING OF THE GAULLIST PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE IN 1974, AND NOW HIS SHARP DISAGREEMENTS WITH CHIRAC--THEIR MOST POPULAR AND PROMISING LEADER.

8. BECAUSE THE GAULLIST DEPUTIES CONTINUE TO FORM THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY'S LARGEST VOTING BLOC AND REMAIN INDISPENSABLE TO GISCARD'S MAJORITY, HE CAN NO MORE AFFORD TO ALIENATE SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS OF THEM NOW THAN HE COULD HAVE WHEN CHIRAC WAS PRIME MINISTER. IF ONLY A THIRD OF THE GAULLIST PARLIAMENTARIANS CHOSE TO OPPOSE THE GOVERNMENT ON A GIVEN ISSUE, THE BARRE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSAL COULD BE DEFEATED.

9. NEW COMPLICATIONS FOR GISCARD: IN SURVEYING THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE AFTER THE CABINET RESHUFFLE, GISCARD FINDS HIMSELF FACED WITH A NEW SET OF TROUBLING PROSPECTS, NAMELY:

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

(A)--A CHIRAC FREE TO PURSUE HIS OWN PRESIDENTIAL AMBITIONS, AND CAPABLE OF ORGANIZING GAULLIST RESISTANCE TO SPECIFIC GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES;

(B)--A GUICHARD SEEMINGLY ILL-SUITED TO THE ROLE OF SPARK-PLUG OF THE MAJORITY'S ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN, BUT READY TO VETO THOSE ELEMENTS OF THE PRESIDENT'S REFORM PROGRAM
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THAT ARE UNACCEPTABLE TO THE GAULLIST RIGHT WING;

(C)--A BARRE WHOSE SELECTION IS PROOF OF GISCARD'S OWN FAILURE TO REMEDY FRANCE'S SERIOUS ECONOMIC ILLS DESPITE THE PRESIDENT'S SELF-PROCLAIMED REPUTATION AS THE COUNTRY'S MOST BRILLIANT ECONOMIC TECHNICIAN; AND

(D)--A UNION OF THE LEFT THAT APPEARS CONFIDENT AND UNITED IN CONTRAST TO THE DIVISIONS AND DISARRAY IN GISCARD'S OWN MAJORITY.

10. OUTLOOK: ALTHOUGH GISCARD HAS A NEW PRIME MINISTER, A REVAMPED CABINET, AND A SWEEPING REFORM PROGRAM READY TO ANNOUNCE, HE SEEMS TO BE A PRISONER OF THE SAME POLITICAL FORCES THAT HAVE FRUSTRATED HIS.EFFORTS SINCE THE BEGINNING OF HIS PRESIDENTIAL TERM. NOTHING THAT GISCARD HAS DONE IN RECENT DAYS CHANGES THE FACT THAT HE STILL HAS ONLY MARGINAL INFLUENCE IN THE COUNTRY'S PRINCIPAL POLITICAL CONSTITUENCIES--THE GAULLISTS AND THE UNION OF THE LEFT. DURING HIS MORE THAN TWO YEARS IN OFFICE, GISCARD HAS FAILED IN HIS VARIOUS ATTEMPTS TO TRANSFORM THE SEVERAL CENTRIST POLITICAL PARTIES INTO A BROADLY BASED, REFORM-ORIENTED THIRD FORCE RESPONSIVE TO HIMSELF. GISCARD OWES HIS POSITION AS HEAD OF THE FRENCH STATE TO A NARROW VICTORY OVER FRANCOIS MITTERRAND IN 1974, NOT TO THE UNCONDITIONAL AND CONTINUING SUPPORT OF A MAJORITY OF THE FRENCH ELECTORATE.

11. IF GISCARD'S RECENT CABINET RESHUFFLE AND UPCOMING PROGRAMMATIC INITIATIVES FAIL TO ATTAIN HIS ANNOUNCED GOAL OF EXPANDING THE GOVERNMENT'S MAJORITY LEFTWARD, HE WOULD SEEM TO HAVE THE FOLLOWING CHOICES:

(A)--RESIGNING HIMSELF TO THE LIKELIHOOD OF A VICTORY BY THE OPPOSITION IN THE NEXT LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS, AFTER WHICH HE WOULD REMAIN AS PRESIDENT AND TRY TO SPLIT THE UNION OF THE LEFT BY EVENTUALLY PERSUADING THE SOCIALISTS TO HEAD A CENTER-LEFT GOVERNMENT EXCLUDING BOTH THE GAULLISTS AND COMMUNISTS;

(B)--ACCEPTING THE CHIRAC STRATEGY FOR A HARD-HITTING
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CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE LEFT THAT WOULD LEAVE THE
GAULLISTS IN CHARGE OF THE MAJORITY'S ELECTION
PROGRAM AND TACTICS; OR

(C)--DISSOLVING THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, BLAMING BOTH THE
OPPOSITION AND THE GAULLISTS FOR THEIR SYSTEMATIC
OPPOSITION TO HIS REFORM PLANS, AND APPEALING FOR
PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR HIS CENTRIST THIRD FORCE.

12. GISCARD WILL CERTAINLY BE WEIGHING THESE CHOICES AS
THE FENCING BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND PARLIAMENT INTENSI-
FIES IN WHAT IS ALREADY A PRE-ELECTION ATMOSPHERE IN
FRANCE. IT IS TOO EARLY TO TELL WHETHER A SPIRIT OF
ACCOMMODATION OR OF DISSENSION WILL ULTIMATELY PREVAIL
WITHIN GISCARD'S MAJORITY. MUCH MORE APPARENT IS THE
EXTREME VULNERABILITY OF THE PRESENT MAJORITY IN A CONTEST
WITH THE UNION OF THE LEFT IF EARLY LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS
ARE HELD IN FRANCE IN THE NEXT SEVERAL MONTHS. ROBINSON

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Margaret P. Grafeld
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EO Systematic Review
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